

SERVICE DATE – JANUARY 23, 2015

**SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD**  
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

**Docket No. AB 1122X**

**Ouachita Railroad, Inc. – Abandonment and Discontinuance Exemption –  
in Union County, Arkansas, and Union Parish, Louisiana**

**BACKGROUND**

In this proceeding, Ouachita Railroad, Inc. (Ouachita) filed a notice of exemption under 49 C.F.R. § 1152.50 seeking exemption from the requirements of 49 U.S.C. § 10903 in connection with the abandonment and discontinuance of service of a line of railroad in Union County, Arkansas, and Union Parish, Louisiana. The rail line proposed for abandonment extends 13.4 miles from milepost 112, approximately 4.7 miles north of the Louisiana/Arkansas border near Junction City, Arkansas, and milepost 125.4 approximately 8.7 miles south of the Louisiana/Arkansas border near Lillie, Louisiana (the Line). A map depicting the line in relationship to the area served is appended to this Environmental Assessment (EA). If the notice becomes effective, the railroad will be able to salvage track, ties and other railroad appurtenances and to dispose of the right-of-way.

**ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

Ouachita submitted an Environmental Report that concludes that the quality of the human environment will not be affected significantly as a result of the abandonment or any post-abandonment activities, including salvage and disposition of the right-of-way. Ouachita served the Environmental Report on a number of appropriate federal, state, and local agencies as required by the Surface Transportation Board's (Board) environmental rules [49 C.F.R. § 1105.7(b)].<sup>1</sup> The Board's Office of Environmental Analysis (OEA) has reviewed and investigated the record in this proceeding.

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<sup>1</sup> The Environmental and Historic Reports are available for viewing on the Board's website at [www.stb.dot.gov](http://www.stb.dot.gov) by going to "E-Library," selecting "Filings," and then conducting a search for AB 1122X.

### ***Diversion of Traffic***

According to Ouachita, no local traffic has moved over the line for at least two years and all overhead traffic was rerouted years ago. Accordingly, the proposed abandonment would not adversely impact the development, use and transportation of energy resources or recyclable commodities; transportation of ozone-depleting materials; or result in the diversion of rail traffic to truck traffic that could result in significant impacts to air quality or the local transportation network.

### ***Salvage Activities***

According to Ouachita, abandonment of the Line would result in the removal of the rail, crossties, and possibly the upper layer of ballast. The Line crosses multiple streams and rivers, including Little Coney Bayou, Turkey Creek, and Beaver Creek, via wooden trestle bridges less than ten feet in height, according to Ouachita. Ouachita does not intend to disturb bridges or sub grade structures and plans to conduct salvage activities using the existing right-of-way and public and private road crossings for access. No new access roads are contemplated. According to Ouachita, salvage activities would not cause sedimentation or erosion of the soil, and Ouachita does not anticipate any dredging or use of fill when removing the track material. Ouachita states that no debris would be discarded along the right-of-way and any work along the right-of-way would be subject to appropriate measures to prevent or control spills from fuels, lubricants or any other pollutant materials.

The line does, however, pass through a 100-year floodplain. Accordingly, we have included the appropriate offices of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Federal Emergency Management Agency on the service list for this proceeding so they receive a copy of this Environmental Assessment for their review and comment. To ensure that the 100-year floodplain is not adversely affected, the railroad shall consult with the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development and the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission prior to commencement of any salvage activities regarding potential impacts to the floodplain and shall comply with the reasonable requirements of these offices.

According to Ouachita, the rail corridor is a remnant of the main line of the Chicago, Rock Island, & Pacific Railroad Company that formerly stretched from Little Rock, Arkansas to Eunice, Louisiana. The Line traverses rural portions of southern Arkansas and northern Louisiana, just east of the main business district of Junction City, Arkansas. Neither Union County nor Union Parish is in a designated coastal zone.

The National Geodetic Survey (NGS) identified 13 geodetic survey marks within the project area. In response, OEA recommends a condition be imposed that that Ouachita shall consult with NGS and notify NGS at least 90 days prior to beginning salvage activities that will disturb or destroy any geodetic station markers.

OEA believes that any air emissions associated with salvage operations would be temporary and would not have a significant impact on air quality. Noise associated with salvage activities would also be temporary and should not have a significant impact on the area surrounding the proposed abandonment.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) submitted comments affirming that abandonment of the Line would be insignificant on the functionality of prime farmland soil. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Arkansas and Louisiana Ecological Field Service Offices provided Official Species Lists of the project area that identified a threatened clam, rabbitsfoot (*Quadrula cylindrical cylindrica*), and an endangered bird, the Red-Cockaded woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*), that may occur in the general vicinity of the project area, however, identified no critical areas that the project might affect.

Based on all information available to date, OEA does not believe that salvage activities would cause significant environmental impacts. In addition to the parties on the Board's service list for this proceeding, OEA is providing a copy of this EA to the following agencies for review and comment: USFWS; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

## **HISTORIC REVIEW**

Ouachita served the Historic Report on the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and Arkansas SHPO, pursuant to 49 C.F.R. § 1105.8(c). Both SHPOs submitted comments stating that the proposed abandonment would not affect any known archaeological sites or historic properties listed in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (National Register). OEA has reviewed the report and the information provided by the SHPO, and we concur with the SHPO's comments.

Pursuant to the Section 106 regulations of the National Historic Preservation Act at 36 C.F.R. § 800.4(d)(1), and following consultation with the SHPO and the public, we have determined that no known historic properties listed in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register would be affected within the right-of-way (the Area of Potential Effect, or APE) of the proposed abandonment. The documentation for this finding, as specified at 36 C.F.R. § 800.11(d), consists of the railroad's Historic Report, all relevant correspondence, and this EA, which have been provided to the SHPO and made available to the public through posting on the Board's website at [www.stb.dot.gov](http://www.stb.dot.gov).

Pursuant to 36 C.F.R. § 800.2, OEA conducted a search of the Native American Consultation Database to identify federally-recognized tribes that may have ancestral connections to the project area.<sup>2</sup> The database did not indicate that any federally-recognized tribes may have

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<sup>2</sup> Native American Consultation Database, <http://grants.cr.nps.gov/nacd/index.cfm> (last visited January 16, 2012).

knowledge regarding properties of traditional religious and cultural significance within the right-of-way (the APE) of the proposed abandonment.

## **CONDITIONS**

We recommend that the following condition be imposed on any decision granting abandonment authority:

- 1. Ouachita Railroad, Inc. shall consult with the National Geodetic Survey (NGS) and notify NGS at least 90 days prior to beginning salvage activities that will disturb or destroy any geodetic station markers.**
- 2. Ouachita Railroad, Inc. shall consult with the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development and the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission prior to commencement of any salvage activities regarding potential impacts to the floodplain and shall comply with the reasonable requirements of these offices.**

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, OEA concludes that, as currently proposed, and if the recommended conditions are imposed, abandonment of the line will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, the environmental impact statement process is unnecessary.

Alternatives to the proposed abandonment would include denial (and therefore no change in operations), discontinuance of service without abandonment, and continued operation by another operator. In any of these cases, the existing quality of the human environment and energy consumption should not be affected.

## **PUBLIC USE**

Following abandonment and salvage of the rail line, the right-of-way may be suitable for other public use. A request containing the requisite four-part showing for imposition of a public use condition (49 C.F.R. § 1152.28) must be filed with the Board and served on the railroad within the time specified in the Federal Register notice.

## **TRAILS USE**

A request for a notice of interim trail use (NITU) is due to the Board, with a copy to the railroad, within 10 days of publication of the notice of exemption in the Federal Register. Nevertheless, the Board will accept late-filed requests as long as it retains jurisdiction to do so in a particular case. This request must comply with the Board's rules for use of rights-of-way as trails (49 C.F.R. § 1152.29).

## **PUBLIC ASSISTANCE**

The Board's Office of Public Assistance, Governmental Affairs, and Compliance responds to questions regarding interim trail use, public use, and other reuse alternatives. You may contact this office directly at (202) 245-0238, or mail inquiries to Surface Transportation Board, Office of Public Assistance, Governmental Affairs, and Compliance, Washington, DC 20423.

## **COMMENTS**

If you wish to file comments regarding this Environmental Assessment, send an **original and two copies** to Surface Transportation Board, Case Control Unit, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Adam Assenza, who prepared this Environmental Assessment. Environmental comments may also be filed electronically on the Board's website, [www.stb.dot.gov](http://www.stb.dot.gov), by clicking on the "E-FILING" link. **Please refer to Docket No. AB 1122X in all correspondence, including e-filings, addressed to the Board.** If you have any questions regarding this Environmental Assessment, please contact Adam Assenza, the environmental contact for this case, by phone at (202) 245-0301, fax at (202) 245-0454, or e-mail at [adam.assenza@stb.dot.gov](mailto:adam.assenza@stb.dot.gov).

Date made available to the public: January 23, 2015.

**Comment due date: February 2, 2015.**

By the Board, Victoria Rutson, Director, Office of Environmental Analysis.

Attachment